

THE ORIGIN OF PABBAJJA ORDINATION FORMULA

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ABSTRACT

Ordination in Buddhism follows a logical sequence and is categorized into two primary types: (1) Pabbajja ordination and (2) Upasampadā ordination. Pabbajja is intended specifically for initiating "samaneras" (novice monks) and "samaneris" (novice nuns), while Upasampadā is designated for the ordination of "bhikkhus" (fully ordained monks) and "bhikkhunīs" (fully ordained nuns). The Pabbajja ordination serves as the preliminary step to Upasampadā, as one must first undergo Pabbajja before advancing to Upasampadā. Each type of ordination possesses its own distinct system, purpose, and objectives. This paper provides an overview of the original Pabbajja system, focusing on the ordination of novices. It also outlines the three levels within female ordination: the Samaneri (female novice), the Sikkhāmāna (female probationer), and the Bhikkhuni (fully ordained nun). Additionally, this article details the procedures involved in Pabbajja for both male and female novices.

Keywords: Pabbajja, Three Refuge, Applicant, age, Sāmañerī, Sikkhāmāna.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term pabbajja is derived from sāmañera hood. There is another meaning for this term which is “going forth from home life to homeless state”. Its precise meaning is to stay away from worldly life or society. This has become a common tradition of lifestyle for world “renouncers” since the pre-Buddhist time. Those who renounced the world might have done so with an aim perhaps to practice the noble brahmacariya life. They lived alone or in community, going for alms-food, moving from one place to another as mendicants. Renunciation such as wandering mendicants, wandering ascetics and homeless ascetics existed long before the dawn of Buddhism. In Buddhist literature, some expressions incorporate the sense of “pabbajja” such as tapasa pabbajja, “going forth taking up an ascetic life”; isi pabbajja, “going forth taking up a hermit life”; sāmañera pabbajja, “going forth taking up the life of a sāmañera/ sāmañeri” in the teaching of the Buddha; upasampadā-pabbajja, “going forth taking up the life of a bhikkhu” in the teaching of the Buddha; aññatitthiyanaribhājakapabbajja, “going forth taking up the life of a wanderer or a mendicant in other heretical sects”, and Ājivaka pabbajja, “going forth taking up the life of a naked ascetic” and so on. In the context of this article, this term pabbajja means the admission of a sāmañera into the Sangha as implied in the expression sāmañera pabbajja, “one who gives up the worldly life to become a sāmañera”.

In the beginning of Buddhism, there was no discernibly difference in the method of conferment of “pabbajja and upasampadā ordinations” as both ordinations could be accomplished only with the saranagamana formula. However, in tracking the historical incidents like the ordination of young Upāli and his companions in Rajagaha, a clear distinction is made between the statuses of the two types of ordination. The Buddha instructed the bhikkhus not to confer upasampadā ordination to anyone under the age of twenty years specifically referring to the group of seventeen boys headed by Upāli. The reason given was their immaturity, being under the age of twenty, their behavior was found very childish and immature such as making noises from night until dawn.

Therefore, it should be assumed that the age restriction was imposed by the Buddha to safeguard the solitude of elder bhikkhus and their tranquil meditation practices. For this reason, the separate name of sāmañera was applied to those of a younger age classification. This is a different lifestyle suited to the Sangha members at a younger age. Thus, pabbajja or sāmañera ordination became the ordination for the younger candidates under twenty years of age. It is necessary to briefly illustrate here why there was the imposition of an age restriction with reference to an incident involving a father and his son.

According to the Vinaya Mahāvagga Pāli, the father was ordained as a bhikkhu and his young son as a sāmañera. The people who saw the old bhikkhu and the young sāmañera going on their alms-round complained that the child might have been born of his wife, a bhikkhunī, because the sāmañera was too young to go for alms-round. For this reason, when the Buddha came to know the situation, a rule was laid down not to confer the pabbajja ordination on one below fifteen years of age. It should also be observed from this story that from the age of fifteen up to twenty, boys should remain in the Sangha as sāmañeras. After a subsequent incident, out of compassion for two surviving young boys of a serious plague, the Buddha reduced the age limit for becoming a sāmañera to an age when one is able to scare a crow away. This pattern of developmental evolution of the rule is not unusual. The first proclamation of the rule limited the

minimal age to fifteen years was changed following an incident to allow the ordination of a boy as a sāmañera when he reaches a minimum age old enough to scare a crow away, a “kakuddepaka”.

The two stories illustrate how and why the minimum age eligible to be initiated as a sāmañera and a bhikkhu were established. These two stories occurred prior to the pabbajja ordination of the Buddha's own son, Rāhula (he was ordained two years after the Buddha's enlightenment). The reason is that at the time of Rāhula's pabbajja ordination, the Buddha re-affirmed thus: “Anujanami, bhikkhave, tīhi saranagamanehi sāmañerapabbajjam”, “I allow you, bhikkhus, to ordain as a sāmañera with these Three Refuges”. This event was much later than the first sāmañera's existence in the Buddha's ministry because at that time, the permission to ordain a sāmañera at the proper age of kakuddepaka had been already given. Many rules for pabbajja were already framed at that time. In addition, the pabbajja's inclusion of this formula can also be clearly seen from the Buddha's original permission for both types of ordination thus: “Anujanami, bhikkhave, imēhi tīhi saranagamanehi pabbajjam upasampadam.” “I allow you, bhikkhus, to confer pabbajja and upasampadam ordinations with these Three Refuges.” Therefore, the pabbajja ordination of Rāhula marked the developmental point in the method of pabbajja ordination only in the sense that the Three Refuges from this point forward became exclusive to this type of ordination.

Prior to the pabbajja ordination of Rāhula or to the upasampadā ordination of Rādha Brahmin, the choice of which ordination to receive may have depended on the desire of an applicant, since this common formula was applied to bestow either pabbajja or upasampadā ordination on the candidate. This is the way that the past missionary bhikkhus could ordain using the saranagamana formula depending on the wish of the candidates. Later, it seemed in part that the Buddha changed the procedures for the upasampadā ordination from this saranagamana to increase the gravitas of this sacred conferment of ordination. Starting with the sāmañera ordination of Rāhula, the saranagamana formula became exclusively assigned for the initiation of pabbajja ordination. Consequently, the nātī-catuttha-kamma replaced the earlier saranagamana formula for the upasampadā ordination.

The present-day minimum age for pabbajja ordination was given by the Buddha after the early version of this rule which fixed at fifteen was relaxed. The relaxation of this rule occurred due to the urgent needs of two young boys, who were the sons of Ven. Ānanda's supporters. Since that incident, the minimum age stipulates that a boy can enter sāmañera-hood if he could chase the annoying crows away while eating. For instance, Rāhula, the sole son of the Buddha, received pabbajja ordination at the age of seven. There were also instances given in the Pāli canon regarding the sāmañeras who had attained arahat-ship at various ages as young as four, five and seven. To name a few, Ven. Ekadipiya became an arahant at the age of four; Venerables Pañcasilasamadaniya, Baduma, Valliya and Candanamaliya all became arahants at the age of five; Venerables Samkicca, Pandita, Sopāka, Revata and Badda all became arahants at the age of seven.

The next important development in ordination procedure was the addition of special rules to both pabbajja and upasampadā ordinations. After the upasampadā ordination of Ven. Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother and the pabbajja ordination of Rāhula, King Suddhodana informed the Buddha that the transition from a lay life to a homeless one was an extremely painful one for the parents, and requested that permission should be obtained from their parents before ordaining their young sons. The Buddha granted his royal father's request. The additional rules of the pabbajja ordination state: “O bhikkhus, a boy without consent of his parents should not be ordained; if ordained, it is a dukkata offence”. In course of time, many rules for ordination came to be set in place as and when necessary to cover all aspects. Accordingly, it is proper here to present the overall procedure of pabbajja ordination.

The Original Procedures of Pabbajja Ordination

The induction of the pabbajja was simply recitation of the saranagamana formula. The applicant for pabbajja must be a kakuddepaka old enough to scare crows away and must have parents' consent. This pabbajja ceremony actually requires a bhikkhu to be an upajjaya. The applicant's head is shaved and puts on ochre robes. The Three Refuges (saranagamana) are repeated after one's upajjnya and one thus becomes a samanera. The procedures were as follows:

1. Informing the Sangha of the intention to shave the head of applicant,
2. Shaving the hair and beard of the applicant,
3. Dressing the applicant in ochre robes,
4. Having the applicant arrange the upper robe over one shoulder,
5. Having the applicant pay respect at the feet of the bhikkhus,
6. Having the applicant squat down on haunches,
7. Having the applicant form añjali with joined palms, and
8. Having the applicant repeat the Three Refuges three times after the upajjhaya.

After becoming a sāmañera, one has to observe the Ten Precepts (dassasikkhāpada), the ten excommunicable offences (dasa nāsana), and the five punishable offences (pañca dandakamma). A sāmañera's upajjhaya looks after and imposes punishment when necessary and the other bhikkhus may impose punishment on the sāmañera only after informing his upajjhaya. Any punishment should be done by means of restriction, "Āvarana" but restricting a sāmañera from entering the whole temple compound or from eating and drinking should not be done. The upajjhaya should not persuade or guide others' sāmañeras, but may only ordain as many sāmañeras as he is able to give the training to. This is the overall picture of the original ordination pattern and lifestyle of the Sāmañeras.

Pabbajja Ordination for female

A female candidate has to receive pabbajja ordination from a pavattini by repeating the Three Refuges and keep the Ten Precepts just as a male samanera does. Thus, she becomes a sāmañerī. The procedures are the same as the pabbajja ordination in the bhikkhu-sangha. No minimum age for initiation of a sāmañerī is found in the Pali canon. The Pali canons mention three arahant theris Pañhadipika Theri, Ekuposathika Therī and Pañcadipayika Therī who had attained the arahatta-magga soon after their admission into the Saagha as sāmañerīs at the age of seven. They were possessed with the patisambhidamagga, four penetrative wisdoms, and abhiñña, the six types of psychic or divine powers. These instances indicate it is safer to take the same minimum age of a kakuddepaka, a person old enough to drive off a crow. However, in addition, a sāmañerī has to undergo the prescribed probationary period.

The Practice of Probationary Period

A sāmañerī before her upasampadā ordination has to take the vows of a sikkhāmāna, a probationary period prior to becoming a bhikkhunī. Upon reaching the prescribed age, she has to request for sikkhāmāna-ship from the bhikkhunī-sangha. Upon successful admittance, she is called a sikkhāmāna and has to practice the six rules for two years consecutively. On completion of sikkhāmāna-ship, she has to request upasampadā ordination from the bhikkhunī-sangha.

2. CONCLUSION

Each side of the Sangha has their own specific ordination method. Although the pabbajja ordination evolved later than upasampadā ordination, it is a prerequisite stage to upasampada ordination. Thus in the bhikkhu-sangha, pabbajja became the first class of ordination and is based on the saranagamana formula. The bhikkhunī-sangha also has pabbajja and upasampadā ordinations. However, an intermediate term of two years as a sikkhāmāna is required as a prerequisite to upasampadā.

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